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## Decision Memo

### Brush Mountain Trails Project

USDA Forest Service  
George Washington and Jefferson National Forests  
Eastern Divide Ranger District  
Montgomery County, VA

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to increase the connectivity between the Town of Blacksburg Brush Mountain Property 2 trail system and the Forest Service Poverty Creek Trail system. This connectivity is needed to use congestion and reduce user conflicts within the two separate trail systems by expanding opportunities for loop trips and longer distance experiences.

### Decision

I propose to construct approximately 6,225 feet of new non-motorized trail and reconstruct and add to the District trails system approximately 860 feet of existing non-motorized trail. The project will implement the proposed action described in Appendix A (attached).

### Decision Rationale

Trail connectivity, easing congestion, and reducing user conflicts are all factors that are driving this effort. The existing Poverty Creek Trail system is heavily used. Parking issues are common, user conflicts are frequent and congestion along trails, especially around the Pandapas Pond area, is increasing. Construction of these trail segments would help reduce these issues by providing trail users a different area to recreate and help disperse use to the more lightly used areas of the trail system. These trail segments would be non-motorized, multi-use trails to be used by mountain bikes, equestrians, hikers, and runners. Three of the segments would establish a connection to the Gateway Trail from the Town of Blacksburg Brush Mountain Park Trail System. The fourth segment would not connect to the Gateway Trail but would provide connectivity across NFS land to the Town of Blacksburg Gateway Park.

The 2004 *Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Jefferson National Forest* (hereinafter referred to as the Forest Plan) recognizes that Forest Lands often serve as backyard playgrounds and tourism attractions for many communities. The project is consistent with Forest Plan Goals and Objectives including providing a spectrum of high quality, nature-based outdoor recreation experiences, and increasing recreation opportunities within the capabilities of the land via hiking, and biking, trail systems, especially in non-motorized settings with high quality landscapes.

## Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I have concluded that these actions can be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under at 36 CFR 220.6(e):

Category 1: *Construction and reconstruction of trails.* 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1)

## Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

Direction provided in FSH 1909.15 (1909.15-2014-1, effective 05/28/2014) requires the Responsible Official to consider whether effects to extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action warrant analysis in an EA or EIS. The Handbook also states that the mere presence of these resources does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. This project was analyzed for the following resource conditions (per FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2) and the results are as follows:

- a. **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species:**  
Surveys were conducted and no endangered, threatened or sensitive plant species were identified.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:**  
No floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watershed would be negatively impacted by the trail reroute.
- c. **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas:**  
The project is not located within any Congressionally designated areas.
- d. **Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas:**  
This project is not located in or near any Inventoried Roadless Areas or potential wilderness areas.
- e. **Research natural areas:**  
The project is not located within or adjacent to any Research Natural Areas or other special designations.
- f. **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites:**  
There are no known American Indian religious or cultural sites.
- g. **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas:**  
There are no known archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.

I have concluded that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

## Scoping and Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning December 5, 2019.

Scoping consisted of reviewing management direction for the project area in the Forest Plan, consulting with Forest Service specialists, agency officials, and the public. An email was sent out on December 9, 2019 to notify interested parties about the proposal. This initiated the public scoping period, which ran for 30 days through January 10, 2020. The project was also discussed at a community meeting on December 10, 2019.

Twelve responses were received from the public or outside organizations for this project, including the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation-Natural Heritage (DCR). Comments were considered but no modifications were made to the proposal.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the direction set forth in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Jefferson National Forest, as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with all applicable laws and regulations.

## Implementation Date

The 2014 Farm Bill directs that the pre-decisional objection process established in the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2012 shall not be applicable to categorically-excluded projects or activities.

Therefore, the Forest Service no longer offers notice, comment, and objection opportunities for categorically-excluded projects. However, these legislative changes and new direction do not limit the public's ability to comment on Forest Service projects and activities. The Forest Service will continue to offer public involvement opportunities for categorically-excluded projects as provided for in its NEPA procedures found in 36 CFR 220.

As a result, the decision may be implemented immediately upon signature of this Decision Memo. This decision is expected to be implemented in the summer of 2020.

## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Erik Taylor, Project Leader at the Eastern Divide District Office at (540) 552-4641, or via email at [Erik.T.Taylor@usda.gov](mailto:Erik.T.Taylor@usda.gov).

*Beth A. Christensen*

*7-9-20.*

*Beth Christensen*  
Eastern Divide District Ranger

*Date*

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## Appendix A.

### Proposed Action

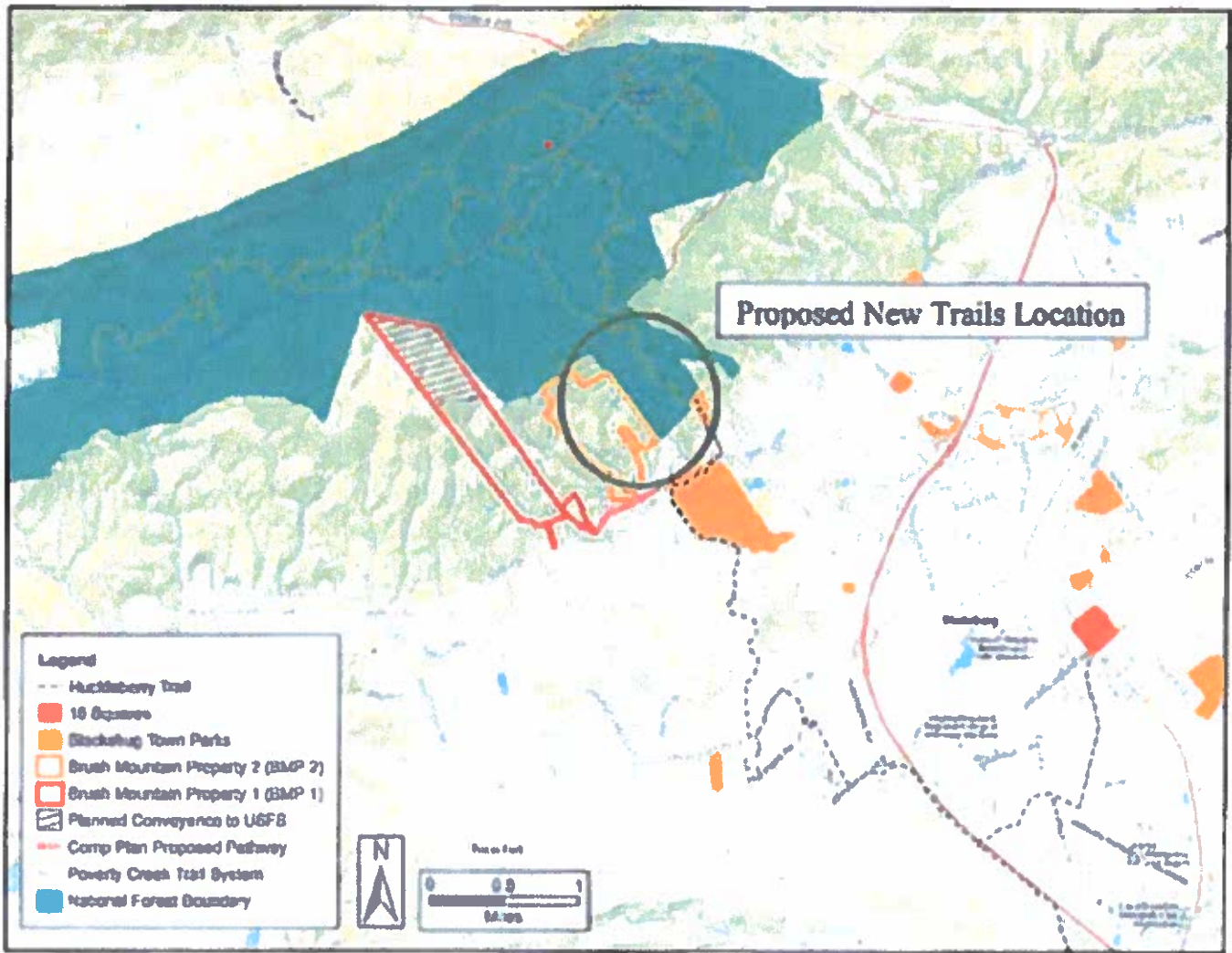
The first trail, labeled as #1, is approximately 800 feet in length and follows an existing non-system route. Currently, this trail is roughly 48" in width and overgrown in places with small trees that are less than four inches in diameter. It would be reconstructed and improved to meet Forest Service standards for mountain bike use and would be open for non-motorized use.

The second trail, labeled as #2, is approximately 1,500 feet in length. This trail would connect to the Gateway Trail from the Brush Mountain trail system and follow along the contour. This trail would be new construction, designed for mountain bike use and accommodating all non-motorized users.

The third trail has 2 segments and is labeled as #3. The upper segment is approximately 525 feet in length and the lower segment is approximately 2,460 feet in length. The upper segment would serve as a switchback that connects back to the Brush Mountain trail system and the lower segment would connect to the Gateway Trail. There is one perennial stream crossing on the lower segment where the crossing would be armored with rock. Both segments are new construction and would be designed for mountain bike use and would accommodate all non-motorized users.

The fourth trail labeled as #4 is approximately 1,000 feet in length. This trail would connect the Gateway Trail to a Town of Blacksburg Park adjacent to the Rotary Bike Skills Park. There is one intermittent stream crossing and it would be armored with rock. This trail would be new construction, designed for mountain bike use and accommodating all non-motorized users.

Motorized equipment may be used to construct the trails at grades less than fifteen percent and in areas free from obstacles. Standard, non-mechanized trail construction practices will be used in the construction for most of the trails. Trails will be full bench construction, with talus slope construction methods used where necessary.





# Proposed New Trails on National Forest

